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The turmoil on college campuses today that centers around the protest demands of black students clearly points to the need for substantive curricular changes. Many students are interested in "relevant" courses which, to them, means moving out of the ivory tower and "into the community." Classroom studies could be linked to ghetto problems in action-oriented activities, such as work-study programs, so that students may work in nearby communities for a part of their school year. It is important to incorporate more material on black Americans into the lower-level introductory courses, and to develop specialized courses on black history, black literature, and other fields at upper levels. There is enough material to justify individual courses in many of these fields. A "qualified" instructor is required for these courses, not necessarily a Ph.D holder but an indigenous person who has knowledge of the subject that may not yet be recognized by traditional criteria for the hiring of faculty. The need for these curricular changes is equally great in all-white, suburban-locked colleges. Then the impact of slavery and oppression on both black and white Americans would be reinterpreted and white students would acquire some understanding of the heterogeneous world in which they live. Also, a curricular evaluation committee should be formed at each institution to conduct intensive research on current courses and to suggest any necessary changes in the curriculum. (WM)

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Section 5
Monday, March 4

CURRICULAR CHANGES TO MEET THE NEEDS OF A BLACK SOCIETY*

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I have been asked to comment on the subject of "curricular changes to meet the needs of a black society." I will make four major points that I feel to be crucial at this time, and then our discussion can take off from there. I agreed to make this presentation because there is no question in my mind of the intense necessity for such changes. The turmoil on many college campuses today, particularly centered around the protest demands of black students, clearly point this up. I believe that most of those demands, substantively and procedurally, are legitimate. There may be a tendency for some in the audience to want to focus on the issues of "autonomy," "black teachers only," etc., but these can be discussed in our general discussion. I am more concerned in my initial presentation with some specific substantive changes as they relate directly to the curricular.

My four areas of emphasis are as follows:

(1) College curricula today in relation to the black society should have a heavy component of combining action with academe. I think it is very important to attempt to combine classroom studies with practical, in-field application. Many students, especially black students, are interested in "relevant" courses. To many of them, this means moving out of the ivory tower and "into the community!" I think this valid. And not only to satisfy the action-oriented nature of much of the youth today, but precisely because only by redefining the "classroom" can we really get at much of the data. In addition, black Americans are in an urgent stage of development. This means, to me, that education wherever possible must be related functionally to particular needs which speak to that urgency.

This is especially important where the college or university has a relatively sizeable (and growing) black student body, and where, as in many places, there is an accessible black community. This would mean, for example, courses in economics which dealt specifically with the problems and prospects of development of producer and consumer co-ops and other business ventures in the ghetto. It would mean courses in political science that dealt with the problems and prospects of development of viable, independent grass-roots electoral and pressure-group structures: given certain political constraints, what are the problems involved in organizin potentially successful representative groups in low-socio-economic black communities? The emphasis you see is on <u>academe for action</u>, on implementation, on development.

I would like to call this audience's attention to the Jewish Studies program at Roosevelt University here in Chicago. It has language, literature, culture studies and history courses, leading to a bachelor's degree. Note the catalog statement:

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The Jewish Studies program is designed to meet the needs of 1) students who have careers or career-plans specifically related to education and social service in the Jewish community; and 2) students who would like to secure a knowledge and appreciation of Jewish culture.

In regard to my comments above, I would say that we should be prepared to rethink our definition of what constitutes a "qualified" instructor. Perhaps the traditional criteria for hiring professors would have to be revised. A Ph.D. with a list of publications behind his name might have to give way to an indigenous activist who has knowledge of the subject not recognized by our established methods of judgment. This is not fatal. It might threaten some of us who have spent years in the library stacks, but modernization always has this element of challenging the old with new elite groupings. Neither should we be concerned especially with "accreditation," simply because I am talking to you this morning about substantially new criteria for judgment of excellence, relevancy and substance. And the accrediting agencies will have to come to terms with this, lest they ---like many of us --- be relegated to realms of anachronism.

I believe we should build into our pre-med and pre-law and other pre-professional programs courses dealing with the responsibility of these professions for helping in the development of a black society. I might add that many young doctors, dentists and lawyers already are working this out on their own as they enter these professions. It is about time, I suspect, that we caught up with our students.

We should allow for much more work-study arrangements whereby students would be able to go out into the communities for a part of their school year and work and study. I would strongly urge that we think in terms of setting up store-front branches in the communities. The models are already there in agricultural extension work, and some colleges and universities do this in other fields. I am not advocating some glamorous, dramatic, "let's go to the people" kind of idolatry of the poor. If what I am suggesting is seen as gimickry to serve as a substitute for the dull, 10 - 10:50, MWF format, then I have not been understood. I am not interested in making our curricular more exciting for the sheer sake of excitement, but more relevant for the sake of a more meaningful education.

(2) It is important to incorporate more material on black Americans into our lower-level introductory courses: history, economics, political science, psychology, sociology, literature. Obviously, much could be done here by simply breaking out from the reading lists we professors hand out year after year. Those lists (and our lecture notes) must be revised now. In a real sense, many of us must re-tool --- almost in front of our students. But we must recognize that a substantial portion of lecture material in those innumerable introductory courses is lacking of meaningful reference to black people. And this has led a number of black students to ask the question: an introduction into what?

At the same time, we can develop specialized courses on black history, black literature, black politics, black psychology, etc. at the upper, advanced levels. Clearly, there is enough material to justify individual courses in many of these fields. I would suggest that we take care and not move hastily here,

precisely because there is indeed a lot to learn. If the college cannot get a "qualified" person to teach these advanced courses, I would be opposed to some of the make-shift efforts I see taking place around the country: many professors are literally throwing together highly technical courses with virtually no knowledge of the material --- and offering these courses within two to three weeks. Some places have tried to deal with this situation by bringing in guest lecturers thruout the semester. Perhaps this is an answer for the time.

We should not overlook the fact that many of our advanced courses must come under scrutiny themselves. Some professors do not like the idea of tampering with their "pet" courses. Thus, they would prefer the department create a separate course dealing with a black subject. But this, to me, is intellectually dishonest. I spoke recently with a professor in a Missouri college who indicated that in his advanced courses on international economic development, it never occured to him to deal with the economic involvement of private American investments in South Africa --- and what that means politically and economically. Indeed, most of our curricular around the country are woefully lacking of any reference to America and her lack of significant economic aid to Africa. We who style ourselves professional seekers after knowledge have an obligation to raise these kinds of questions in our courses.

(3) It is important to remind that curricular changes are not only necessary where there is a black student body, or an adjacent black community. In that all-white, surburban-locked college, the need is equally great. These places must have courses that reinterpret the impact of slavery and oppression on both white and black Americans. White students need to know the history of black Americans as much as black students; those white students need to know the poetry of Langston Hughes and Countee Cullen as well as that of Walt Whitman and Carl Sandburg. Those students need to know the socio-political studies of W.E.B. DuBois and Charles Johnson as well as those of Max Weber and V.O. Key. They need to examine and understand the impact of Marcus Garvey as well as that of William Jennings Bryan. My point is that unless these all-white --- and realistically speaking, likely to remain all-white for some time --- colleges begin to revise their curricular, they will continue to graduate students into a middle-class mediocrity. They will be mediocre precisely because they will be incomplete in their knowledge of this heterogeneous world and puzzled by the pluralistic forces beginning to make their voices heard all over. While I was asked to talk about curricular changes to meet the needs of a black society, those needs cannot be met if we focus only on the black society. That society cannot be understood or helped in a vacuum. Indeed, I would go further and suggest that many of the problems in the black society begin without question with the ignorance and insensitivity in the white society.

(4) Finally, I would strongly propose that each and every college and university in this country establish immediately a form of curricular-re-evaluation mechanism. Yes, unfortunately, another faculty committee! Such a group would conduct penetrating research, in-depth examination of the courses offered on their campuses. The goal would be to advise professors and departments about ways to make relevant changes. I have absolutely no intention of trying to dictate to individual professors what each should teach. I am talking about advising them. Understandably, many of the professors need such substantive advice (the example earlier of the international economics course is pertinent here), precisely because they are products themselves of relatively insensitive

graduate departments that have short-changed them in their education. (We must be careful to guard against the situation whereby a Black Studies Department, etc. is set up and then no further attention is paid to the rest of the curriculum.) The committee could be composed of knowledgeable black students, faculty in the field, and black consultants in particular fields of expertise. (As quiet as it has been kept, such black experts do exist around the country. Granted, they are at a premium, but that simply means that these ventures will cost some money. We have always known that education was an expensive undertaking!) The point is that each college should develop some serious, competent, on-going mechanism for reviewing and suggesting changes in the curricular. The findings would be advisory --- not mandatory --- but if my professor-colleagues are the rational, open-minded people they claim to be, I think this could open up a fruitful area of intellectual discourse. I would suggest that these colleges begin to think in such specific, substantive terms as they devise their lecture

series for the next semesters. This would be far more meaningful --- academically ---than much of what I see happening now, whereby there is some big campus-wide symposium on "white racism" with outside speakers coming in --- talking generally, answering a few questions and that's that. Why not hold sessions where you ask experts to come in to deal with the literature being used, criticize it, suggest innovations, etc.? This is an area, as you and I fully know, that has been closed pretty much up to now.

And as we work out solutions, using the four specific points I have outlined as guides or any others you might prefer, I hope we recognize that there is more to be gained from charting the future than from apologizing for the past; there is more to be gained from challenging our minds than from blowing our minds; there is more to be gained from moving fearlessly ahead than from trying to hang on to entrenched established interests. Many professors and colleges have only their vanity and their irrelevancy to sacrifice, and these really are small costs to pay for development toward a more viable society.